



LP, Avondale agree on I-10 funding package, chastise Goodyear

Conflict could delay project

Annemarie Moody and David Madrid

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The Litchfield Park City Council on Wednesday approved a funding agreement for the accelerated widening of Interstate 10, but not without chastising Goodyear.

Also, the accord is in line with what Avondale endorsed Monday night, in terms of cost sharing, but it conflicts with the agreement that Goodyear has approved, which means the freeway acceleration could be delayed based on lack of consensus.

Reading aloud from a letter he crafted, Mayor Thomas Schoaf accused Goodyear of jeopardizing the project, which would speed up the widening of I-10 in the Southwest Valley by four years.

"Avondale and Litchfield Park did not put this process at risk," Schoaf said at Wednesday night's council meeting.

"Goodyear put this process at risk and continues to do so by refusing to communicate with our cities. Goodyear failed to consult or discuss any compromise with us, and now won't return our calls."

Contacted Thursday morning, Goodyear Mayor Jim Cavanaugh said his city has been upfront through the entire process, and he blames Litchfield Park and Avondale for potentially holding up the freeway acceleration.

The dispute dates back to an August meeting of the MAG regional council, which voted to give the three cities only \$6 million of the \$10 million the Legislature had earmarked for cities as reimbursement for getting the freeway widening started early.

Cavanaugh, who also heads the MAG regional council, felt the Southwest Valley cities should pay for the \$4 million without further negotiations so the project wouldn't get delayed.

But Avondale and Litchfield Park fought for a better compromise, eventually getting MAG to give the three cities \$7 million. So now Avondale and Litchfield Park want a bigger share of the additional \$1 million that MAG awarded them, leaving Goodyear to pick up the rest of the tab.

Cavanaugh said both Litchfield Park and Avondale voted in favor of the latest MAG motion to share nearly \$3 million the cities would have to put up for the freeway work.

"That's what everybody at that meeting understood," Cavanaugh said. "And I don't understand where Litchfield Park and Avondale now feel they have a prerogative to modify that to their advantage."

Goodyear, Schoaf said Wednesday, "was happy to accept" just \$6 million. But now, it wants part of the additional \$1 million in reimbursement funds.

"Goodyear has done nothing to identify and obtain funds to augment or offset the cost to widen I-10 (which would ultimately benefit all of our taxpayers)," Schoaf said. "Goodyear is now also sticking to its position that it expects its full share of the money that was obtained by Avondale and Litchfield Park, and has resorted to employing a one-sided debate through the press which at best ignores the facts."

Cavanaugh said if Litchfield Park and Avondale would just go along with what they voted for at MAG, the freeway expansion could go out to bid by the end of the month.

"If however, they are trying to change the agreement, that could delay things," Cavanaugh said. "This road has to be built as soon as possible, and any delay, in my mind, is unacceptable, and I question it from a moral standpoint too. We have to capability of moving forward now."

Avondale Councilmen Frank Scott and Ken Weise attended Wednesday's council meeting, showing their alliance to Litchfield Park.

"I'd rather get \$7 million fighting than \$6 million done behind closed doors," Scott said.

Schoaf "has worked diligently to get \$10 million," Scott added. "He's put in a lot of hours and to have it dealt away is not right."

All three cities must pass the same agreement so that the Arizona Department of Transportation can request bids on the project.

Officials hope to see the widening begin within months, instead of 2011, the original date without acceleration.

The stretch of I-10 between Loop 101 and Sarival Road that is the target of the widening is a congested and dangerous stretch of freeway. The three cities have sought to widen the freeway to five lanes in each direction, up from as few as two lanes in each direction.

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